

DESCRIPTION

Apparatus for evaluating deterioration condition of catalyst of internal
combustion engine

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Technical Field

The present invention relates to an apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine and, more particularly, to an apparatus for evaluating the deterioration
10 condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine that can improve the accuracy of an evaluation of the deterioration condition of a catalyst and can suppress a worsening of emissions.

Background Art

15 There are publicly known techniques in which an oxygen sensor that detects the oxygen concentration in exhaust gases is provided downstream of a sensor provided in an exhaust system of an internal combustion engine and the air/fuel ratio upstream of the catalyst of the internal combustion engine is forcedly set to a rich condition or a lean
20 condition on the basis of a detected value of this oxygen sensor, thereby to evaluate the deterioration condition of the catalyst (refer to, for example, the Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. H6-129285).

In this conventional apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine, after the
25 oxygen sensor outputs a detected value of a lean condition or a rich

condition, the air/fuel ratio control is reversed so that a target air/fuel ratio becomes a rich condition or a lean condition after a lapse of a predetermined time.

5 Disclosure of the Invention

In the conventional apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine, however, the air/fuel ratio control is not reversed until a predetermined time elapses and this predetermined time is not changed according to the operation
10 condition (load condition) of an internal combustion engine. Therefore, the control condition of a lean air/fuel ratio or a rich air/fuel ratio is continued more than necessary and a delay occurs in the start of reverse control, thereby posing the problem that there is a possibility that emissions might be worsened.

15 In the case of irregularities in the flow of exhaust gases, for example, when exhaust gases flow so as to hit nonuniformly against the above-described oxygen sensor that detects the oxygen storage capacity (hereinafter referred to "OSC" as required) of a catalyst, the output of the oxygen sensor becomes dependent on a local OSC
20 condition and is reversed, with the result that there is a possibility that the OSC of the whole catalyst might be incapable of being measured. That is, the conventional apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine had the problem that there is a possibility that the OSC that the catalyst has
25 might not be completely used up and there is a possibility that the

accuracy of an evaluation of the deterioration condition of the catalyst might decrease.

Furthermore, in the conventional apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine, particularly when the load of the internal engine is light, changes in the output of the oxygen sensor downstream of the catalyst are not stable if the air/fuel ratio upstream of the catalyst is controlled to a rich condition, that is, the output of the oxygen sensor does not show what is called Z characteristics to changes in the oxygen concentration, thereby posing the problem that there is a possibility that the accuracy of an evaluation of the deterioration condition might decrease.

The present invention has been made in view of the foregoing and has as its object the provision of an apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine that can improve the accuracy of an evaluation of the deterioration condition of a catalyst and can suppress a worsening of emissions.

To solve the above-described problems and achieve the object, the apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to claim 1 of the invention is an apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine that forcedly sets the air/fuel ratio upstream of a catalyst provided in an exhaust system of an internal combustion engine to a rich condition or a lean condition on the basis of a detected value of oxygen concentration detection means downstream of the catalyst in the internal combustion engine and evaluates the oxygen

storage capacity of the catalyst from the detected value of the oxygen concentration detection means, which is characterized in that the oxygen concentration detection means downstream of the catalyst reversely outputs a detected value thereof from a lean condition to a rich condition or from a rich condition to a lean condition and reverses air/fuel ratio control so that the air/fuel ratio upstream of the catalyst becomes a lean condition or a rich condition when an integrated value of an absorbed oxygen volume of the catalyst or an integrated value of a released oxygen volume after a predetermined timing has reached a predetermined value.

The apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to claim 2 of the invention is characterized in that in the invention described in claim 1, the predetermined timing is a timing at which the oxygen concentration detection means downstream of the catalyst reversely outputs an output thereof from a lean condition to a rich condition or from a rich condition to a lean condition and in that the integrated value of an absorbed oxygen volume or the integrated value of a released oxygen volume is an integrated value of an admitted air volume of the internal combustion engine.

The apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to claim 3 of the invention is characterized in that in the invention described in claim 2, the integrated value of an admitted air volume is changed for each load region of the internal combustion engine.

The apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to claim 4 of the invention is characterized in that in the invention described in claim 1, the predetermined timing is a timing at which the air/fuel ratio upstream
5 of the catalyst is reversed from a rich condition to a lean condition or from a lean condition to a rich condition and in that the integrated value of an absorbed oxygen volume or the integrated value of a released oxygen volume is an integrated value of an admitted air volume of the internal combustion engine.

10 According to the apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to the invention (claim 1), the oxygen concentration detection means downstream of the catalyst reversely outputs the detected value from a lean condition to a rich condition or from a rich condition to a lean
15 condition and can evaluate, with good accuracy, the OSC which the catalyst has on the basis of an integrated value of an absorbed oxygen volume of the catalyst or an integrated value of a released oxygen volume after a predetermined timing. Also, it is possible to suppress a worsening of emissions by using up the OSC which the catalyst has.

20 According to the apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to the invention (claim 2), it is possible to evaluate the deterioration condition of the catalyst with good accuracy on the basis of an integrated value of an admitted air volume after the oxygen concentration detection means
25 downstream of the catalyst reversely outputs an output thereof from a

lean condition to a rich condition or from a rich condition to a lean condition.

According to the apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to the invention (claim 3), by adjusting the integrated value of an admitted air volume according to changes in the load of the internal combustion engine, it is possible to minimize a worsening of emissions that can occur by maintaining the air/fuel ratio upstream of the catalyst in a lean condition when the air/fuel ratio downstream of the catalyst is in a lean condition or by maintaining the air/fuel ratio in a rich condition when the air/fuel condition downstream of the catalyst is in a rich condition.

According to the apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to the invention (claim 4), it is possible to evaluate the deterioration condition of the catalyst with good accuracy on the basis of an integrated value of an admitted air volume after the air/fuel ratio upstream of the catalyst is reversed from a rich condition to a lean condition or from a lean condition to a rich condition.

20 Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG 1 is a time chart that shows the concept of delay control;

FIG 2 is a schematic illustration of an internal combustion engine in which an apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst is mounted;

25 FIG 3 is a flow chart of control operations related to

Embodiment 1;

FIG 4 is a flow chart of control operations related to

Embodiment 1;

FIG 5 is a graph that shows the relationship between the delay
5 volume and the value of O₂ storage capacity C_{max}.

FIG 6 is a flow chart of control operations related to
Embodiment 2 of the invention;

FIG 7 is a flow chart that shows a routine for calculating the
oxygen balance of a catalyst;

10 FIG 8 is a flow chart that shows a routine for judging the
deterioration of a catalyst; and

FIG 9 is a time chart of the concept of control.

Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention

15 Embodiments of an apparatus for evaluating the deterioration
condition of an internal combustion engine related to the invention will
be described below on the basis of the drawings. It should be noted
that the invention is not limited by these embodiments.

20 Embodiment 1

FIG. 2 is a schematic illustration of an internal combustion
engine in which an apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition
of a catalyst related to Embodiment 1 of the invention is mounted. As
shown in FIG. 2, an internal combustion engine 10 is provided with an
25 air intake passage 30 and an air exhaust passage 20. In the air

exhaust passage 20, an upstream catalyst 21 and a downstream catalyst 22 are arranged in series in order to clean exhaust gases.

That is, exhaust gases discharged from the internal combustion engine 10 are cleaned first by the upstream catalyst 21 and exhaust gases incapable of being cleaned by this upstream catalyst 21 are cleaned by the downstream catalyst 22.

These catalysts 21, 22 can store predetermined amount of oxygen and are constructed in such a manner that when unburned components such as hydrocarbon (HC) and carbon monoxide (CO) are contained in exhaust gases, these unburned components are oxidized by using the stored oxygen and when oxidized components such as nitrogen oxides (NOx) are contained in exhaust gases, these oxidized components are reduced and released oxygen can be stored.

Upstream of the upstream catalyst 21, there is provided an air/fuel ratio sensor that detects the oxygen concentration in exhaust gases (hereinafter referred to as a "main O₂ sensor") 23. That is, this main O₂ sensor 23 detects the air/fuel ratio of an air-fuel mixture burned in the internal combustion engine on the basis of the oxygen concentration of the exhaust gases that flow into the upstream catalyst 21.

Downstream of the upstream catalyst 21, there is provided an air/fuel ratio sensor that detects the oxygen concentration in exhaust gases (hereinafter referred to as a "sub O₂ sensor") 24. That is, on the basis of the oxygen concentration of the exhaust gases that have flown out of the upstream catalyst 21, this sub O₂ sensor 24 detects whether

the exhaust gases are fuel rich exhaust gases (exhaust gases containing HC and CO) or fuel lean exhaust gases (exhaust gases containing NOx). Also the upstream catalyst 21 is provided with a temperature sensor that detects exhaust gas temperature (not shown).

5 In the air intake passage 30, there are provided an air filter 31, an intake-air temperature sensor 32 that detects intake-air temperature, an air flow meter 33 that detects an intake air volume, a throttle valve 34, a throttle sensor 35 that detects throttle opening, an idle switch 36 that detects the fully closed condition of the throttle valve 34, a surge
10 tank 37, a fuel injection valve 38, etc.

Various sensors such as the above-described O₂ sensors 23, 24, a vehicle speed sensor 39 and a cooling water temperature sensor 40 are connected to an electrical control unit (ECU) 41, which controls the internal combustion engine 10 on the basis of output values of these
15 sensors and performs an evaluation of the deterioration condition of the catalysts.

The upstream catalyst 21 cleans exhaust gases by releasing oxygen into fuel rich exhaust gases and storing excessive oxygen in fuel lean exhaust gases. For this reason, the cleaning capacity of the
20 upstream catalyst 21 decreases with a decrease in the maximum oxygen volume capable of being stored by the upstream catalyst 21, i.e., the oxygen storage capacity (hereinafter abbreviated as OSC) of the upstream catalyst 21.

Therefore, it is important to estimate the condition of the OSC
25 which this upstream catalyst 21 has as accurately as possible and to

forcedly operate a target air/fuel ratio in a rich condition or a lean condition on the basis of the estimation. However, as described above, in the case of irregularities in the flow of exhaust gases, for example, when exhaust gases flow so as to hit nonuniformly against the sub O₂ sensor 24 that detects the condition of the OSC, the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 becomes dependent on a local OSC condition and is reversed, with the result that there is a possibility that the OSC (a net value of O₂ storage capacity, C_{max}) of the whole upstream catalyst 21 might be incapable of being measured. That is, there is a possibility that the OSC which the upstream catalyst 21 has might not be completely used up.

Hence, in Embodiment 1, in order to use up the whole of the OSC which is only partially used, a control target of the air/fuel ratio (hereinafter referred to as "target A/F") is reversed after a predetermined delay after the reversing of the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 in order to reverse the air/fuel ratio upstream of the upstream catalyst 21, and this delay is set on the basis of an integrated intake air volume (the amount of exhaust gas) that passes through the upstream catalyst 21.

Control operations related to Embodiment 1 will be described below on the basis of FIGS. 1, 3 and 4. FIG. 1 is a time chart that shows the concept of delay control, and FIGS. 3 and 4 are each a flow chart of control operations related to Embodiment 1. The control related to Embodiment 1 is hereinafter referred to as "active A/F control." As shown in FIGS. 3 and 4, first, a determination is made

whether execution conditions for active A/F control hold (Step S10).

The flag "exrefst" (refer to FIG. 1) is a flag that becomes on when the execution conditions for active A/F control is satisfied.

If the execution conditions for active A/F control is not satisfied
5 ("No" in Step S10), the control operations are returned to START
through Step S17. That is, in Step S17, a request flag 'exlskp' for
setting the target A/F of main feedback control (written as "main FB" in
the figures) to a lean condition is turned off, a request flag 'exrskp' for
setting the target A/F of main feedback control to a rich condition is
10 turned off, a flag 'exlskpd' for setting the target A/F of main feedback
control to a lean condition is turned off, a flag 'exrspd' for setting the
target A/F of main feedback control to a rich condition is turned off, and
an integration count 'egasum' of the amount of exhaust gas passing
through the catalysts (the upstream catalyst 21 and the downstream
15 catalyst 22) necessary for setting a delay volume, which will be
described later is cleared (0 is substituted in $\text{egasum}[n]$, where n is an
integer). In this manner, by turning off each of the above-described
flags and clearing the integration count 'egasum' of the amount of
exhaust gas passing through the catalyst 21, preparations are made for
20 active A/F control.

If execution conditions for active A/F control is satisfied and the
flag 'exrefst' is on ("Yes" in Step S10), integration of the amount of
exhaust gas (amount of intake air) that passes through the upstream
catalyst 21 is performed by clearing the integration count 'egasum'
25 $\text{egasum}[n+1] = \text{egasum}[n] + \text{ega}$, ega is a predetermined passing

exhaust gas amount) (Step S11).

Next, a determination is made whether this is the first target A/F changing timing after satisfaction of execution conditions for Step S10 at which a shift is made from a usual feedback control state to an active control state. If this is the first target A/F changing timing ("Yes" in Step S12), a determination is made whether the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is not less than a predetermined value Va (Step S13). An optimum value is set beforehand by an experiment and the like as this preset value Va.

10 If the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is not less than a predetermined value Va ("Yes" in Step S13), the flag 'exlskp' is turned on and the flag 'exrskp' is turned off (Step S14). And furthermore, the flag 'exlskpd' is turned on and the flag 'exrskpd' is turned off (Step S15). By setting each of the above-described flags in this manner, the target A/F of main feedback control is set to a lean condition and the operations are returned to START (Step S16). For example, if the target A/F during usual stoichiometric control is 14.6 or so, the control target value is set at 15.1 or so.

On the other hand, unless the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is not less than a predetermined value Va ("No" in Step S13), the flag 'exlskp' is turned off and the flag 'exrskp' is turned on (Step S19). And furthermore, the flag 'exlskpd' is turned off and the flag 'exrskpd' is turned on (Step S20). By setting each of the above-described flags in this manner, the target A/F of main feedback control is set to a rich condition and the operations are returned to START (Step S21). For

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example, if the target A/F during usual stoichiometric control is 14.6 or so, the control target value is set at 14.1 or so.

If this is not the first target A/F changing timing after satisfaction of execution conditions in Step S10 above, that is, if this is after the first
5 target A/F change ("No" in Step S12), the state of the request for target A/F setting at this point of time is stored (Step S18). That is, flag 'exlskp' is substituted in a flag 'exlskpold', at the same time flag 'exrskp' is substituted in the 'exrskpold', and these are stored.

And as shown in FIG. 4, a determination is made whether the
10 output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is less than a predetermined value VI, which is a threshold value when the target A/F is reversed to the rich side (Step S30). An optimum value is set beforehand by an experiment and the like as this predetermined value VI.

If the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is less than the
15 predetermined value VI ("Yes" in Step S30), the flag 'exlskp' is turned off and the flag 'exrskp' is turned on (Step S31).

Subsequently, a determination is made whether the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 has been reversed (Step S32). That is, if the flag 'exlskpold' stored in Step S18 above is different from the flag 'exlskp'
20 set in Step S31 above or if the flag 'exrskpold' stored in Step S18 above is different from the flag 'exrskp' set in Step S31 above, it can be determined that the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 has been reversed.

When the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 has been reversed ("Yes" in Step S32), the integration count 'egasum' of the amount of
25 exhaust gas passing through the upstream catalyst 21 is cleared (0 is

substituted in $\text{egasum}[n + 1]$) and the operations are returned to START (Step S33).

On the other hand, if this is not the reversing timing of the output of the sub O_2 sensor 24 ("No" in Step S32), that is, if a lean condition is continued after reversing to the lean condition, a determination is made whether a reading of the integration count 'egasum' of the amount of exhaust gas passing through the upstream catalyst 21 is not less than a predetermined value G_a (Step S34). Unless the integration count 'egasum' is not less than the predetermined value G_a ("No" in Step S34), there is a possibility that the OSC has not been used up. Therefore, the target A/F is not reversed to the rich side and the operations are returned to START.

If the integration count 'egasum' is not less than a predetermined value G_a ("Yes" in Step S34), it can be determined that the OSC has been used up and, therefore, the flag 'exlskpd' for setting the target A/F to a lean condition is turned off and the flag 'exrskpd' for setting the target A/F to a rich condition is turned on (Step S35).

In this manner, the OSC of the upstream catalyst 21 can be used up by performing the routine of Step S34 above until the integration count 'egasum' becomes not less than a predetermined value G_a , thereby to ensure a predetermined delay, and by delaying the timing of reversing the target A/F using this time lag. And each of the flags is set as described above, the target A/F is set at a rich condition, and the operations are returned to START (Step S36). For example, if the target A/F during usual stoichiometric control is 14.6 or so, the

control target value is set at 14.1 or so.

If in the determination of Step S30 above, the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is not less than a predetermined value V_l ("No" in Step S30), a determination is further made whether the output of this sub O₂ sensor 24 exceeds a predetermined value V_r, which is a threshold value when the target A/F is reversed to the lean side (Step S40). A minimum value is set beforehand by an experiment and the like as this predetermined value V_r.

If the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 exceeds a predetermined value V_r ("Yes" in Step S40), the flag 'exlskp' for setting the target A/F to a lean condition is turned on and the flag 'exrskp' for setting the target A/F to a rich condition is turned off (Step S41).

Subsequently, a determination is made whether the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 has been reversed (Step S42). That is, if the flag 'exlskpold' stored in Step S18 above is different from the flag 'exlskp' set in Step S31 above or if the flag 'exrskpold' stored in Step S18 above is different from the flag 'exrskp' set in Step S31 above, it can be determined that the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 has been reversed.

When the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 has been reversed ("Yes" in Step S42), the integration count 'egasum' of the exhaust gas volume passing through the upstream catalyst 21 is cleared (0 is substituted in $\text{egasum}[n + 1]$) and the operations are returned to START (Step S43).

On the other hand, if the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 has not been reversed to the lean side ("No" in Step S42), that is, if a rich

condition is continued after reversing to the rich condition, a determination is made whether the integration count 'egasum' of the amount of exhaust gas passing through the upstream catalyst 21 is not less than a predetermined value Ga (Step S44). Unless the integration count 'egasum' is not less than the predetermined value Ga ("No" in Step S44), there is a possibility that the OSC has not been used up. Therefore, the target A/F is not reversed to the lean side and the operations are returned to START.

If the integration count 'egasum' is not less than a predetermined value Ga ("Yes" in Step S44), it can be determined that the OSC has been used up and, therefore, the flag 'exlskpd!' for setting the target A/F to a lean condition is turned on and the flag 'exrskpd!' for setting the target A/F to a rich condition is turned off (Step S45).

In this manner, the OSC of the upstream catalyst 21 can be used up by performing the routine of Step S44 above until the integration count 'egasum' becomes not less than a predetermined value Ga, thereby to ensure a predetermined delay, and by delaying the timing of reversing the target A/F using this time lag. And each of the flags is set as described above, the target A/F is set at a lean condition, and the operations are returned to START (Step S46). For example, if the target A/F during usual stoichiometric control is 14.6 or so, the control target value is set at 15.1 or so.

In Embodiment 1, integration is performed by setting a constant value as the delay and giving a predetermined weight factor for each load region as a value of an integrated air volume of the integration

count 'egasum' that determines the amount of delay. That is, when the load is high, a weight factor in the direction in which the integrated air volume increases is given in consideration of the fact that the response of the sub O₂ sensor 24, whereas a weight factor in the direction in which the integrated air volume decreases is given when the load is low. As a result of this, because it is possible to arbitrarily adjust the integration speed of a delay according to changes in load, the occurrence of a useless delay can be avoided as far as possible and the possibility of a worsening of emissions can be minimized.

Next, the effect of Embodiment 1 will be described on the basis of FIG. 5. FIG. 5 is a graph that shows the relationship between the delay and the value of O₂ storage capacity C_{max}. In the figure, the air/fuel ratio A/F and the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 are also shown. As shown in the figure, it is apparent that by setting an optimum delay (an optimum value of an integrated air volume after the reversing of the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24) in a predetermined load region, the O₂ storage capacity C_{max}, which has shown great fluctuations of value, becomes stable behind the white arrow in the figure.

As described above, according to the apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to Embodiment 1, the deterioration condition of a catalyst can be evaluated with good accuracy by using up the O₂ storage capacity (OSC) which the upstream catalyst 21 has and stabilizing a calculated OSC.

Furthermore, because the integration speed of the delay is

arbitrarily adjusted according to changes in the load of the internal combustion engine 10, the occurrence of a useless delay volume can be avoided as far as possible and the possibility of a worsening of emissions can be minimized.

5 In Embodiment 1, the delay volume was defined by the reaching of an integrated air volume after the reversing of the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24. However, the invention is not limited to this, and the delay volume may be defined, for example, by a lapse of a predetermined time after the reversing of the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 (timer control). Also, the delay may be defined as a change
10 in the accumulated oxygen volume after the reversing of the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24.

 Also, the above description was made on the assumption that when a constant value is set as the amount of delay, integration is
15 performed by giving a predetermined weight factor for each load region as a value of an integrated air volume of the integration count 'egasum' that determines the amount of delay.

Embodiment 2

20 The construction of the internal combustion engine 10 and its apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst are the same as the construction shown FIG. 2 of Embodiment 1. Therefore, the same items as already described or equivalent thereto are given like reference numerals and their overlapping descriptions are omitted
25 or simplified.

FIG. 6 is a flow chart of control operations related to Embodiment 2 of the invention, and the flow chart shows a routine for calculating the target A/F of main feedback control (main FB). FIG. 7 is a flow chart that shows a routine for calculating the oxygen balance of a catalyst, FIG. 8 is a flow chart that shows a routine for judging the deterioration of a catalyst, and FIG. 9 a time chart of the concept of control.

When the air/fuel ratio of the upstream catalyst 21 is controlled to a rich condition, particularly in a case where the load of the internal engine 10 is light, sometimes changes in the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 were not stable, that is, the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 did not show what is called Z characteristics to changes in the oxygen concentration, thereby reducing the accuracy of an evaluation of the deterioration condition. Embodiment 2 provides means for solving such problems.

When the oxygen concentration of exhaust gases downstream of the upstream catalyst 21 was measured during the control of the air/fuel ratio of the upstream catalyst 21 in an experiment, it was ascertained that the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 increases and is reversed to the rich side although the oxygen concentration shows a lean condition. In contrast to this, it was ascertained that when the air/fuel ratio of the upstream catalyst 21 is controlled to a lean condition after the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 becomes a rich condition, the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 changes accurately because the output is reversed to the lean side when the oxygen concentration of exhaust gases downstream

of the upstream catalyst 21 changes to be lean largely.

Because there is a correlation between the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 and an actual air/fuel ratio downstream of the upstream catalyst 21 in this manner, in Embodiment 2, the amount of oxygen (an absorbed oxygen volume or a released oxygen volume) stored in the upstream catalyst 21 is estimated by utilizing that, for example, the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is reversed from a rich condition to a lean condition, and control is performed so that the deterioration condition of the upstream catalyst 21 can be evaluated on the basis of this estimated value. This control method will be concretely described below on the basis of FIGS. 6 to 8 with simultaneous reference to FIGS. 2 and 9.

As shown in FIG. 6, first, a determination is made whether execution conditions for active A/F control is satisfied (Step S50). If execution conditions for active A/F control is not satisfied ("No" in Step S50), the operations are returned to START through Step S55. That is, a flag 'exlskp' for setting the target A/F of main feedback control (main FB) to a lean condition is turned off, and a flag 'exrskp' for setting the target A/F of main feedback control to a rich condition is turned off. Preparations are made for active A/F control by turning off each of the flags in this manner.

If execution conditions for active A/F control is satisfied ("Yes" in Step S50), a determination is made whether this is the first target A/F changing timing after satisfaction of execution conditions at which a shift is made from a usual feedback control state to an active control

state (Step S51). If this is the first target A/F changing timing ("Yes" in Step S51), a determination is made whether the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is not less than a predetermined value Va (Step S52).

If the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is not less than a predetermined value Va ("Yes" in Step S52), the target A/F of main feedback control is set to a lean condition (Step S53) and the operations are returned to START. That is, the flag 'exlskp' is turned on and the flag 'exrskp' is turned off (Step S53), and the operations are then returned to START.

On the other hand, unless the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is not less than a predetermined value Va ("No" in Step S52), the target A/F of main feedback control is set to a rich condition (Step S54) and the operations are returned to START. That is, the flag 'exlskp' is turned off and the flag 'exrskp' is turned on (Step S54), and the operations are then returned to START.

If this is not the first target A/F changing timing after satisfaction of execution conditions in Step S50 above, that is, if this is after the first target A/F change ("No" in Step S51), a determination is made whether the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is less than a predetermined value VI, which is a threshold value when the target A/F is reversed to the rich side, and the flag 'exrskp' for setting the target A/F of main feedback control to a rich condition is off (Step S56).

If the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is less than a predetermined value VI and the flag 'exrskp' is off ("Yes" in Step S56), a number of times count for calculating OSARISE, which is an integrated

value of an excess oxygen volume, is incremented by one (Step S57).

And the target A/F of main feedback control is set to a rich condition (Step S58) and the operations are returned to START. That is, the flag 'exlskp' is turned off and the flag 'exrskp' is turned on (Step
5 S58), and the operations are then returned to START.

On the other hand, if the conditions that the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 is less than a predetermined value V_l and the flag 'exrskp' is off is not satisfied ("No" in Step S56), a determination is made whether the output of this sub O₂ sensor 24 is not less than a predetermined
10 value V_r, which is a threshold value when the target A/F is reversed to the lean side, the flag 'exlskp' for setting the target A/F of main feedback control to a lean condition is off and OSAFALL, which is an integrated value of an insufficient oxygen volume is smaller than a determination value 1 (negative value)(Step S59).

15 If the conditions of Step S59 above is satisfied ("Yes" in Step S59), the number of times counter for calculating OSAFALL is incremented by one (Step S60). And the target A/F of main feedback control is set to a lean condition (Step S61) and the operations are returned to START. That is, the flag 'exlskp' is turned off and the flag
20 'exrskp' is turned on (Step S61), and the operations are then returned to START. On the other hand, if the conditions of Step S59 above is not satisfied ("No" in Step S59), this is outside the target of this control and, therefore, the operations are returned to START.

Next, a control routine for calculating the oxygen balance of the
25 upstream catalyst 21 will be described on the basis of FIG. 7 with

simultaneous reference to FIG. 9. This routine for calculating the oxygen balance is performed by constantly monitoring the flag 'exrskp' and flag 'exlskp' controlled in FIG. 6.

First, whether the flag 'exrskp' is on is monitored, and if the flag
5 'exrskp' is on, that is, if the target A/F of main feedback control is set to a rich condition ("Yes" in Step 70), a determination is made whether the flag 'exrskp' has been set from off to on (Step S71) in this control routine.

If the flag 'exrskp' has been set from off to on in this control
10 routine ("Yes" in Step S71), resetting is performed by substituting zero in OSAFALL, which is an integrated value of insufficient oxygen volume (Step S72), OSAFALL as an insufficient oxygen volume is integrated (Step S73), and the operations are returned to START.

If the flag 'exrskp' has not been set from off to on in this control
15 routine ("No" in Step S71), Step S72 above is jumped and the operations go to Step S73. That is, by multiplying a difference between the air/fuel ratio at this point of time and an air/fuel ratio during stoichiometric control by a weight ratio (0.23) of an injected fuel volume to oxygen at this point of time, the insufficient oxygen volume OSAFALL
20 is integrated for each routine that passes Step S73.

On the other hand, if the flag 'exrskp' is not on, that is, if the target A/F of main feedback control has not been set to a rich condition ("No" in Step S70), a determination is made whether the flag 'exlskp' is on, that is, whether the target A/F of main feedback control has been
25 set to a lean condition (Step S74). If the target A/F of main feedback

control has not been set to a lean condition ("No" Step S74), the operations are returned to START. If the target A/F of main feedback control has been set to a lean condition ("Yes" Step S74), a determination is made whether the flag 'exlskp' has been set from off to on in this control routine (Step S75).

If the flag 'exlskp' has been set from off to on in this control routine ("Yes" in Step S75), resetting is performed by substituting zero in OSARISE, which is an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume (Step S76), OSARISE as an excess oxygen volume is integrated (Step S77), and the operations are returned to START.

On the other hand, if the flag 'exlskp' has not been set from off to on in this control routine ("No" in Step S75), Step S76 above is jumped and the operations go to Step S77. That is, by multiplying a difference between the air/fuel ratio at this point of time and an air/fuel ratio during stoichiometric control by a weight ratio (0.23) of an injected fuel volume to oxygen at this point of time, the excess oxygen volume OSARISE is integrated for each routine that passes Step S77.

Next, a routine for judging the deterioration of the upstream catalyst 21 will be described on the basis of FIG. 8 with simultaneous reference to FIG. 9. This routine for determining the deterioration of the catalyst is performed by constantly monitoring a number of times counter for calculating OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, which was calculated in Step S57 in FIG. 6 and a number of times counter for calculating OSAFALL, an integrated value of an insufficient oxygen volume, which was calculated in Step S60.

First, a determination is made whether OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, and OSAFALL, an integrated value of an insufficient oxygen volume, have been calculated each at least once (Step S80). If the two values have been calculated each at least once ("Yes" in Step S80), a determination is made whether a reading of the number of times count that counts OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, has been counted up this time (Step S81). If the number of times count that counts OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, has not been counted up this time ("No" in Step S81), the operations are returned to START.

On the other hand, if the number of times counter that counts OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, has been counted up this time ("Yes" in Step S81), a determination is made whether the number of times count that counts OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, exceeds a predetermined abnormality determination value that is determined beforehand (Step S82). When OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, does not exceed this abnormality determination value ("Yes" in Step S82), the value is determined to be abnormal (Step S83) and the operations are returned to START.

When OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, exceeds the above-described abnormality determination value ("No" in Step S82), a determination is further made whether OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, exceeds a predetermined normality determination value (Step S84). If OSARISE,

an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, exceeds a predetermined normality determination value ("Yes" in Step S84), the value is determined to be normal (Step S85) and if OSARISE does not exceed this normality determination value ("No" in Step S84), the operations are returned to START.

As shown in FIG. 9, at a time t_2 when OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, shows a predetermined normality determination value and OSAFALL, an integrated value of an insufficient oxygen volume, has reached a predetermined determination value, the target A/F of the upstream catalyst 21 is reversely controlled to the lean side. That is, at a time t_2 after a lapse of a predetermined delay volume (time) from a time t_1 in FIG. 9 the target A/F of the upstream catalyst 21 is reversely controlled to the lean side and, therefore, in this delay time the OSC which the upstream catalyst 21 has can be completely used up.

Thus, even in a case where the output of the sub O_2 sensor 24 is reversed from the lean side to the rich side, with the upstream catalyst 21 not releasing oxygen sufficiently during the control of the A/F of the upstream catalyst 21 to a rich condition, it is possible to change the control to a lean control after continuing the rich control of the above-described A/F until OSARISE, an integrated value of an excess oxygen volume, (an integrated value of a released oxygen volume) of the upstream catalyst 21 becomes a value sufficient for making an abnormality determination or a normality determination.

As described above, according to the apparatus for evaluating

the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to Embodiment 2, even in a case where changes in the output of the sub O₂ sensor 24 are not stabilized particularly as when the load of the internal combustion engine 10 is light, it is possible to use up the OSC which the upstream catalyst 21 has and to stabilize a calculated OSC, whereby the deterioration condition of the catalysts 21, 22 can be evaluated with good accuracy.

Industrial Applicability

As described above, the apparatus for evaluating the deterioration condition of a catalyst of an internal combustion engine related to the invention can use up the OSC which the catalyst has and evaluate the deterioration condition of the catalyst with good accuracy and is useful in an internal combustion engine that can suppress a worsening of emissions.